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ABSTRACT

The Johari Window--a model that categorizes degree of self-awareness and openness in communication into (1) information known to self and others (open), (2) information known to self but not to others (hidden), (3) information known to others but not self (blind), and (4) information known neither to self nor to others (unknown)--is a frequently used pedagogical and research tool. To test its reliability and validity, 61 male and 99 female undergraduates from basic communication courses were classified as either open or hidden, based on their responses to the Johari Window, and were then administered reliable and valid measures of self-esteem and communication anxiety. Although it had been reasoned that people seeing themselves as more open would have higher levels of self-esteem, results of these measures showed no significant differences between the hidden and open groups, indicating that the Johari Window does not predictably relate to any of the tested measures. The lack of significant findings may be due, in part, to the Window's failure to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure. Though apparently not a useful research tool, the model still can be an important pedagogical device if it is accompanied by necessary qualifications. (MM)

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An Examination of the Johari Window as a Research Tool and a Theoretical Model

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An Examination of the Johari Window as a Research Tool and a Theoretical Model

There may be few conceptual models as well known to students in interpersonal communication as the Johari Window. First developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (1955) to demonstrate self-awareness and openness in interpersonal relationships, this model has become one of the most commonly cited sources in texts of interpersonal communication. To illustrate, a sample of ten recent interpersonal communication texts found the Johari Window used in every one of them (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Towne, 1980; Stewart & D'Angelo, 1980; Emmert & Donaghy, 1981; Barker, 1981; Taylor, Rosegrant, Meyer, & Samples, 1980; DeVito, 1982; Tubbs & Moss, 1980; Pearson & Nelson, 1979; Giffin & Patton, 1976; Scott & Powers, 1978). Given the wide-spread usage, it would be difficult--if not impossible--to estimate the number of students exposed to the conceptual orientation of the Johari Window during the past quarter century.

Because of the reliance on the Johari Window as an explanatory tool, it is not surprising to discover that the model has been adapted for research (Esposito, McAdoo, & Scher, 1978). The adaptation is quite straight-forward: respondents are shown the Johari Window (Figure 1) and instructed "Imagine that 100 points represents your total self. Distribute those 100 points into the

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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four boxes as you feel is most important." (Esposito et al., 1978, pg. 80). The resulting four numbers represent the self as perceived by the respondent.

While the addition of the Johari Window Test to the research measures used in speech communication is a welcome one, the validity of the test has not yet been convincingly demonstrated. The validating study had only 27 students; further, the test was administered at the beginning and again at the end of a human development course. The resulting changes showed a significant increase in the Public Self and a significant decrease in the Private Self. However, as is no doubt clear, the "right" answers in such a test are obvious to all but the most socially naive. It is also well known that respondents are all too eager to please the experimenters in such situations and may even respond with answers which are more "right" than they are accurate (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969). Hence, we are left with a promising tool which is unverified as yet. That is the purpose of the present investigation.

While several types of validity might be used in this situation, one immediately comes to mind: concurrent validity. By selecting a pool of well established tests which logically ought to relate to the public and private self-perception of the Johari Window Test, it should be possible to compare the test to other reliable and valid measures (Cronbach, 1970, pg. 122). If the predicted relationships emerge, we may then argue that the Johari Window Test measures the same or similar qualities as measured by the other more established measures. It would be

unrealistic to expect that every single personality measure would predictably relate to the Johari Window Test but we should be able to gain a better understanding of the concept by comparing several different measures. The tests chosen for this task are : (1) self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), and (2) communication anxiety (McCroskey, 1970). In addition, the distribution of the sexes across the public and private quadrants will also be examined.

Self-Esteem

While there are a large number of measures developed to assess a person's self-esteem, one appears to be uniquely suitable to college aged persons (Rosenberg, 1965). This brief ten-item scale has been shown to have a remarkably stable factor structure (Hensley & Roberts, 1976; Hensley, 1977) and appears to measure the same underlying concept for both males and females (Hensley, 1977).

We would suspect that self-esteem would be theoretically related to those orientations described by the words "open" and "hidden." In fact, Taylor et al. (1980) observe that "with self-disclosure, views of the self become more positive (pg. 212)." Further, Barker (1981, pg. 28) notes that "self concept . . . is developed through interaction with people." These comments clearly suggest that those persons who see themselves as predominately "open" should logically be those with higher levels

of self-esteem than those who see themselves as predominately "hidden."

Communication anxiety

At least to researchers in the field of communication the variable of communication anxiety is a familiar one (McCroskey, 1970). Moreover, the validity of this measure is clearly beyond the questionable stage (McCroskey & Young, 1981; McCroskey, 1978). Finally, communication anxiety also appears to be independent of gender (McCroskey, Simpson, & Richmond, 1981).

We might logically expect that a person who is open is a person who communicates with others about the self. A person who is predominately hidden is a person who, for some reason, avoids such communication. It would not be at all surprising then to discover that those persons who describe themselves as "open" should also report that they possess lower levels of communication anxiety than those who describe themselves as "hidden."

Gender

Perhaps at the very heart of the differences between an open person and a hidden person is the concept of self-disclosure. While the early research on self-disclosure indicated that females self-disclosed more than males (Cozby, 1973), more recent research summaries have called this finding into question (Adler, et al., 1980, pp. 61-64; DeVito, 1982; pp. 290-291). It appears that males and females avoid self-disclosure to others for rather different reasons but, in the main, the overall tendency is probably for a greater proportion of women to self-disclose than

for men to do so. Therefore, we would be expected to find that a greater proportion of females than of males classify themselves as being in the open quadrant.

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 212 male and female undergraduates, all volunteers from basic communication courses at a large midwestern university. They were told that they would be given extra credit for completing a questionnaire on the ways people see themselves.

Sample selection

Esposito et al., (1978) found significant pre to post test changes in the public and private selves of their respondents. However, they found no changes in the blind or unknown selves. Upon reflection, this is understandable. The public and private quadrants are the only ones known to the respondent. It is unreasonable to expect a person to respond about aspects of his or her life which are unknown. Both past research and theoretical considerations thus lead toward examining only those persons who consider themselves predominately open or hidden.

On the basis of the numerical responses placed in the four quadrants of the Johari Window, the criterion established was that the larger number in any of the four cells must fall into either the open or hidden cell for an individual to be used in this study. Using this criterion the sample was reduced to 61 males and 99 females. However, it must be noted that 75% of the sample falls into one of the two categories of interest for this

study. It is obvious that subjects seem to feel that their forte lies in those areas known to the self.

Results

Examination of the 120 open persons vs. 41 hidden persons revealed no discernable differences in their scores on self-esteem (t = 128; df = 53, p = .21). The open persons had a mean score of 37.74 on the self-esteem measure whole those who classified themselves as hidden had a mean score of 35.88. In a similar manner, communication anxiety showed no significant differences (t = .29; df = 63; p = .77). The mean score for open persons on communication anxiety was 27.71; for those persons who were hidden the mean was 28.12.

Turning to the examination of biological sex, the results are equally non-significant. Of the 99 females in the sample, 77 reported being open; 42 of the 61 males also reported being predominately open. This distribution is not significant. (X^2 = 1.14; df = 1; p = .28).

Discussion

These results seem to leave little doubt that the Johari Window Test does not appear to predictably relate to any of the tested measures. Unless further validating data is forthcoming, research using the Johari Window Test should probably be suspended. It is not clear at this point what is being measured by the Johari Window Test, but whatever it is, the quality being assessed does not seem to be what we would logically expect.

In retrospect it is not particularly surprising that the test of the Johari Window would fail to show any of the predictable

relationships. The open quadrant is described simply as information known to the self and to others. Such information would presumably be obtained by the self-disclosure of the person to others. Granting that appropriate self-disclosure may be at the heart of psychological well-being (Derlega & Chaiken, 1975), there are nonetheless instances in which self-disclosure may be extremely dysfunctional. For persons who cannot distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure and who consequently may reveal every detail of their lives to total strangers, self-disclosure may be devastating (Derlega & Chaiken, 1975, Chapt. 2). The Johari Window, by not distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure, confounds rather than illuminates the concept of openness. Cozby (1973) has suggested that poorly adjusted persons "are characterized by either high or low disclosure to virtually everyone (pg. 78)." The open quadrant certainly excludes the former but it mistakenly includes the latter types. Having made this observation, we are now lead toward an additional speculation.

There is a more far-reaching implication to be drawn from this study. Looking at the instructions for the test and at the Johari Window itself, it is inconceivable that wide scale misunderstanding could occur for either. Ruling out misunderstanding raises the spector that the Johari Window may be theoretically flawed to the extent that it bears little relationship to reality. When clearly predictable relationships fail to emerge from an unambiguous testing procedure, the possibility that we may have erred in our conceptual formulation

must be entertained. The implications raised here are probably moot for researchers; if the test measures nothing, do not use it. For teachers however the matter is not so simple.

Most teachers have encountered the dilemma of getting students to comprehend and ingest the material of a text withough subsequently embracing the written words as a final decree from the Almighty. A few superior students have no difficulty making the necessary distinction but many, if not most, see textbook material in rather black and white terms. The familiar cry arises, "if it wasn't true, they wouldn't print it!" Mature scholars know better, freshmen do not.

The implications here are subtle but substantive. Even though the Johari Window Test is probably not a useful research tool it may be a very important pedagogical device to illustrate self-awareness and openness. But the concept's relationship to the ways in which people relate to themselves and to others is open to serious theoretical questions. The model we have used for so long with so many students may need substantial limitations to accompany its presentation in texts or in classes. Simply because the Johari Window is a convenient teaching device in no way means that the model accurately describes human behavior. Such a caveat, phrased in unmistakable terms, appears to be in order in our classrooms.

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Figure 1

The Johari Window

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known to others	Public/open	Blind
Unknown to others	Private/ Hidden	Unknown